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# Letter dated 4 April 2016 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter dated 1 April 2016 from the Special Representative of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Nida **Jakubonė**
Deputy Permanent Representative
Chargé d'affaires a.i

16-05436 (E) 060416

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## Annex to the letter dated 4 April 2016 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On behalf of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, it is with great urgency that I draw your attention to ongoing violations of the Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities in Syria by the Assad regime, including its deliberate air strikes in areas occupied by civilians and its systematic denial of humanitarian assistance to civilians in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, in direct violation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2254 (2015), 2258 (2015) and 2268 (2016).

Violations by the Assad regime of the Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities that entered into effect on 27 February 2016 are growing in both frequency and lethality. On 31 March, at least 33 civilians were killed and more than 30 injured after the Syrian regime launched a series of barrel bomb attacks and surface-to-surface missile attacks in areas occupied by civilians in Rif Dimashq and Aleppo. Among the targeted locations was Dayr al-Asafir, where the Assad regime's air strikes deliberately struck a hospital, an ambulance and a school, killing and injuring innocent children, mothers and brave rescue workers who were selflessly pulling bodies from the rubble.

The recent intensification of air strikes perpetrated by Assad's forces represents a direct violation of the Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities, which demand the full implementation of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) and prohibits attacks with any weapons, including aerial bombardments by the Air Force of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, against armed opposition groups. Yet in the four weeks since the Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities came into effect, almost 900 breaches have been recorded, the vast majority of which have been perpetrated by the Assad regime. Throughout the past month, Assad's forces have targeted civilians and members of the moderate armed opposition with air strikes and barrel bombs in Idlib, Aleppo, Homs, Rif Dimashq, Ladhiqiyah, Dar'a and Hama, killing or injuring an estimated 200 civilians.

As indiscriminate attacks by Assad's forces have worsened, so too have its deadly sieges of opposition-held areas. The Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities stipulate that Assad's forces must allow humanitarian agencies "rapid, safe, unhindered and sustained access throughout areas under their operational control and allow immediate humanitarian assistance to reach all people in need". Yet today, over 1 million Syrians are under siege in 46 areas, and 4.6 million people remain in need in besieged and hard-to-reach areas across Syria. Some areas have not been reached in several months or even years. The Syrian regime continues to deny access to Darayya, East Harasta and Duma and to brazenly stop medical equipment from reaching those who need it most. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has reported that medical supplies and treatments, such as those for child malnutrition, are routinely removed from aid convoys by the Syrian regime — a war crime which the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator has called scandalous. In the first three months of 2016, the Syrian regime removed or excluded more than 80,000 medical supplies and treatments from inter-agency convoys.

The Assad regime's repeated violations of the Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities cost Syrian lives and threaten to derail ongoing efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement to the conflict. It is unacceptable that innocent lives continue to be lost to the Assad regime's air strikes and tactics to starve them into submission. It is also incomprehensible that humanitarian access should continue to be made contingent upon permission from the Syrian regime, when Security Council resolution 2258 (2015) gives United Nations humanitarian agencies the mandate to deliver aid across borders and across conflict lines. On behalf of Syrian civilians in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, I therefore call upon Member States:

(a) To rigorously monitor, verify and enforce the Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities, including by putting into place effective measures to protect civilians from indiscriminate air strikes and establishing clear consequences for violations of the Terms;

(b) To break the sieges across Syria, particularly in Darayya, Duma and East Harasta, and across all the areas in which populations are being starved into submission. Should the establishment of humanitarian corridors prove impossible, Member States must airdrop aid to the 46 besieged communities in Syria;

(c) To apply pressure on the Syrian regime to ensure the immediate release of the detainees held unlawfully, particularly women and children — none of whom has been released since the Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities came into effect;

(d) To ensure accountability for war crimes, including those perpetrated by the Russian Federation. Should the Security Council's paralysis continue to prevent the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, Member States must take action to try cases under national and universal jurisdiction.

The Assad regime's air strikes and sieges are designed to sabotage the Geneva peace process. Such acts of violence must be met with a clear and immediate response by the international community, including through effective measures to protect civilians. Failure to enforce the Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities will only undermine Syrian efforts to achieve a political solution in Syria and render the ceasefire unsustainable. We must not allow the first glimmer of hope in five years to perish. Member States must act now to enforce international law and the Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities, protect civilians and ensure the delivery of aid. In so doing, they will protect our best chances at a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

(*Signed*) Najib **Ghadbian**
Special Representative of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution
and Opposition Forces to the United Nations

## Enclosure

## Violations of the Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities from 27 February to 31 March 2016

- There have been at least 896 documented breaches of the Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights
- The Syrian regime and Russian Federation are responsible for the overwhelming majority of breaches committed, including 75 per cent of the deaths of civilians recorded in the first three weeks of the cessation of hostilities, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights
- Approximately 200 civilians have been killed in Syria throughout the cessation of hostilities
- The primary causes of death have been shelling, air strikes, shooting and detention, according to the Violations Documentation Center in Syria
- More than 1 million Syrians are under siege in 46 areas across Syria, including in Madaya and in the governates of Damascus, Homs, Dayr al-Zawr and Idlib. Ninety-six per cent of the areas under siege (or 44 of the 46 besieged areas) are besieged by the Syrian regime, according to Siege Watch
- The Syrian regime continued to obstruct humanitarian aid delivery, as a result of which the United Nations and its partner organizations made only five deliveries of aid and reached just a small fraction of the Syrians living in besieged areas, according to Physicians for Human Rights
- The Syrian regime continued to detain and torture thousands of people unlawfully. At least 39 people died in detainment as a result of torture and execution during the first month of the Terms for the Cessation of Hostilities, according to the Violations Documentation Center in Syria